

Pesticide Drift and Organic Farms

To Whom It May Concern:

Your neighbor has applied for organic certification from the Washington State Department of Agriculture for crops adjacent to your property. The organic crop production standards prohibit organic producers from application of synthetic pesticides to their organic crops and lands. Likewise, the drift of synthetic pesticides onto organic crops is prohibited and may jeopardize their organic certification status. The loss of organic certification could cause economic hardship to your neighbor because he or she could no longer market this product as organic.

Pesticide Drift

Drift is the physical movement of particles or droplets through the air from the area where it is being applied to locations outside the targeted area. Under WAC 16-156-004(3), "Drift" is defined as the movement of prohibited substances by air, water or soil from the intended target and results in residues of prohibited substances on organic or transition to organic food in excess of 5% of the EPA tolerance level. Under RCW 15.86.100, organic crops that are subjected to drift may not be sold as organic. When an organic crop has been drifted upon, it results in the suspension of organic certification on the site affected by the drift. The Washington State Supreme Court has applied the doctrine of Strict Liability in cases of injuries caused by pesticide drift. When drift occurs on an organic farm, the party causing the drift is held responsible for all damages associated with the drift, including the value of the crop if the crops are unmarketable.

The Washington State Department of Agriculture inspects organic farms for compliance with the organic crop production standards. A component of these inspections includes collecting samples and having them analyzed for pesticide residues. Samples are collected in areas where contamination is most likely to occur, such as borders between organic and conventional crop production. If positive residues from these tests are in excess of the 5% EPA tolerance level, the crop is no longer classified as organic.

Your cooperation to minimize any offsite drift of synthetic pesticides onto your neighbor's crops is essential to maintain the organic integrity of his or her crop and site.

Preventing Drift

Due to the liability associated with drifting onto an organic farm, the best course of action is one of prevention. To preclude drift problems from occurring, you may want to adopt some of the following practices:

1. Determine if you will be applying pesticides in an area adjoining an organic farm.
2. Communicate with the management at the organic farm. Inform them of the types of materials you plan to use and your plans to prevent drift from occurring. Some materials have much lower EPA tolerance levels (e.g. Chlorpyrifos on pears tolerance is 0.01 ppm).
3. If you will be applying pesticides near an organic farm there are several points to consider:
 - Do you know the boundaries of the organic site?
 - Is the organic farm downwind of the prevailing wind?
 - Is the organic farm uphill or downhill from your application site?
 - Is there a buffer zone between the organic fields and where you are applying pesticides?

Other Points to Consider:

- You may want to establish a buffer zone that provides sufficient distance between the organic fields and your target fields. (A 25' minimum is required.)
- Ensure that all workers applying pesticides are aware of the adjoining organic field boundaries and take all necessary precautions when applying pesticides/herbicides in those areas.
- Use non-chemical control methods whenever practical.
- For row crops, use ground application equipment rather than aerial applications whenever possible.
- If aerial application must be used, please inform your applicator of the proximity and boundary of the adjoining organic site.
- Practice Integrated Pest Management principles by monitoring pest levels, knowing the economic threshold, and spraying only when necessary.
- Communication with your neighbor about these issues can usually solve the border drift problems listed above.

If you would like more information about the Organic Food Program, please call (360) 902-1877, FAX (360) 902-2087, email: organic@agr.wa.gov, or view the Organic Food Program Website: www.wa.gov/agr/fsah/organic/ofp.htm.

Sincerely,

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